A Note on Nathaniel Highmore, M.D. [1613-1685], and his Memorial Tablet in Purse Caundle Church, Dorset

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By W. de Courcy Prideaux.

I had occasion some time since to visit Purse Caundle, near Sherborne, to take records of the memorial brasses there, and in course of inquiries I found that Dr. Nathaniel Highmore was stated to be buried there, and that an inscription to his memory had been placed in the chancel. Inspection, however, failed to discover this, but further inquiry, after I had published the brass rubbings, satisfied me that it must be at Purse Caundle, and I made a special visit. I was rewarded by finding a portion of the slab protruding from below the chancel floor. The Rector very kindly granted me leave to have a portion of the flooring removed, and to my great delight I saw the whole uncovered, and, the dust of years being removed, I was able to secure the rubbing I now have the pleasure of showing you to-day (*see* figure).

This gentleman, son of Nathaniel Highmore, Rector there in 1613, was born at Fordingbridge, in Hampshire, matriculated at Queen's College on November 4, 1631, and was elected scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, 1632, proceeded to Bachelor in Physic, 1641, and next year M.D. He practised with great success at Sherborne, never taking a fee of the clergy, among whom he had great practice, and was many years Justice of the Peace for the County. He published "Corporis humani Disquisitio Anatomica," 1651, folio, to which he added an appendix, but died before it was finished; "The History of Generation: with a General Relation of the Manner of it as well in Plants as Animals," London, 1651, 8vo; "Discourse of the Cure of Wounds by Sympathy,"

London, 1651, 8vo; "De hysteriâ passione, et de affectione hypochondriacâ: theses duae Oxon et Amstel," 1660; "Considerations on Scarborough Spa," and an "Account of the Springs at Farringdon and East Chinnock," in the *Philosophical Transactions.*

He discovered a new duct in the testicles; and from him the antrum Highmorianum, or great cavity in the maxilla, took its name.

By his will, dated March 4, 1684, he left an annuity of £5 to be raised out of his houses in the Borough of Newland, in Sherborne, to a poor boy sent from the free Grammar School there, by the free choice of the governors to the University, for the term of six years, and so from time to time during the term of seventy-six years. To the master of the almshouse in Sherborne the sum of £50 to be employed in erecting a workhouse, if they shall go about such a work. His twenty-one copper-plates of anatomical figures to the Royal Society; and his long table of muscles to the physic-school at Oxford. His executors were his brother, Richard Highmore, of Purse Caundle, clerk, and his cousin, William Highmore, of Winterborne, clerk; his residuary legatee, his cousin, Nathaniel Highmore, clerk. A small head of him makes a frontispiece to his text-book on anatomy, published in 1651, folio.

"The Hon. Mr. Boyle to Mr. Oldenburg.

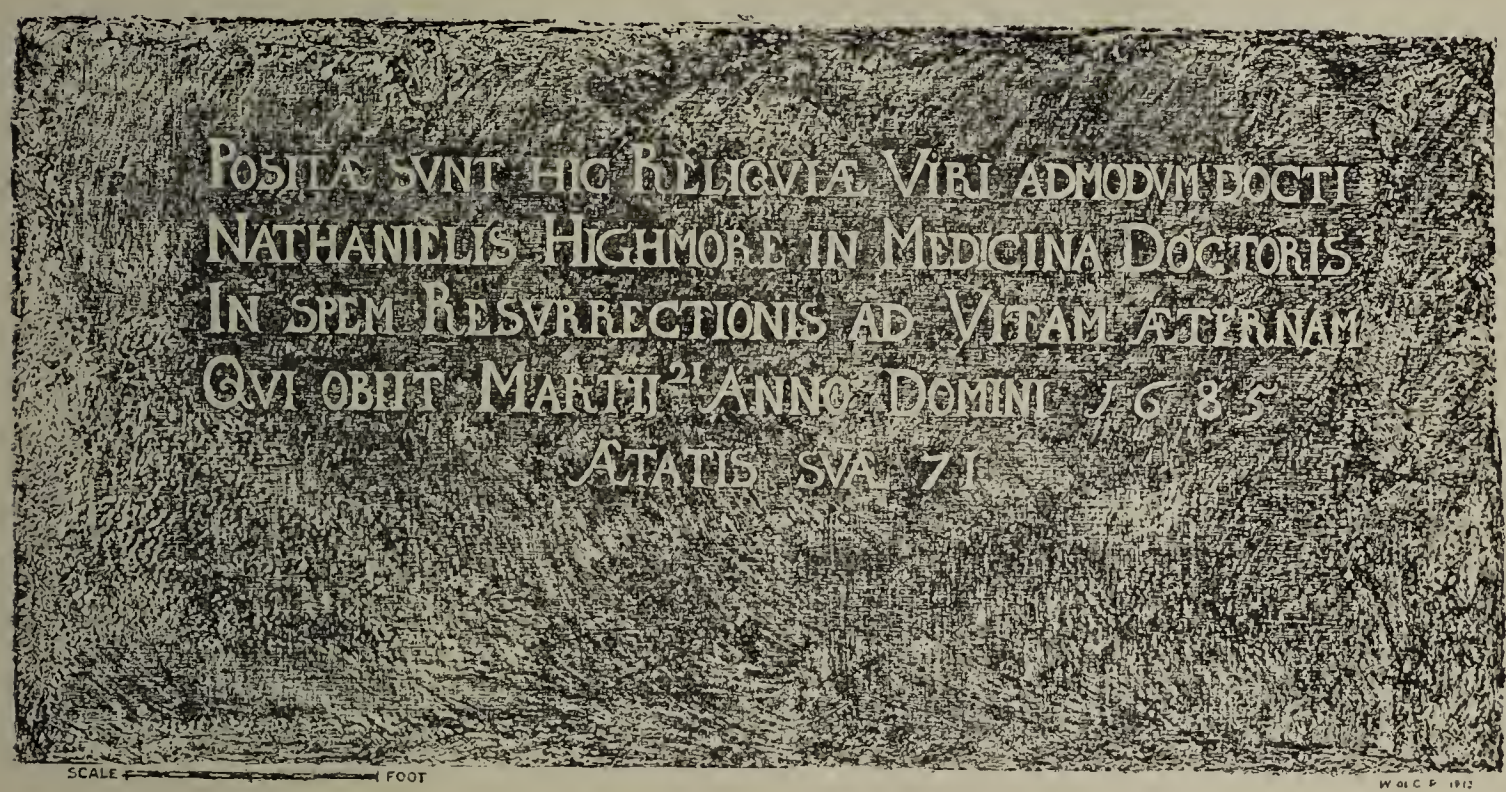
"Oxford, August 29, 1664.

"I was visited in Dorsetshire by the ingenious Dr. Highmore, from whom I had some odd anatomical observations, wherewith I may hereafter acquaint you. I shall rather tell you now that he is a great florist; and finds by experience that there is scarce any mold comparable for flowers to the earth which is digged from under old stacks of wood, or other places where rotten wood has long lain."

He was evidently a many-sided man and did not content himself with the study of medicine, his varied interests keeping his mind fresh and alert.

I find that Edward Highmore was instituted to Purse Caundle as Rector in 1603; Nathaniel Highmore (father of the physician), as Rector in 1613; Edward Highmore, living there in 1645; Richard Highmore, instituted May 15, 1695, and died in 1717. So, for more than a century, Highmores were Rectors of Purse Caundle, and it would seem a great pity that this fine marble slab should be allowed to remain in obscurity below rotting timbers, seeing it is the only memorial existing to a man whose name is so often used by the healing fraternity at large.

At present hidden below the oak Chancel floor of Purse Caundle Church, of which Parish his father and other relatives were Rectors from 1603 to 1717, is this black marble Slab—To the Memory of the celebrated Anatomist and Writer, who, elected scholar of Trinity in 1632, was M.D., Oxon., 1642. He practised with success at Sherborne: was for many years J.P. for the County of Dorset, and greatly beloved by rich and poor.



which may be translated :—

Here have been laid (to rest) in hope of the Resurrection to the Life Eternal, the remains of Nathaniel Highmore, M.D., a man of great learning, who died 21st March A.D. 1685, in the 71st year of his age.

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